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ABSTRACT

This brief policy paper outlines considerations that school district personnel should address in determining the inclusion of students with disabilities in state and district testing and the use of alternate assessment for certain students with disabilities. It notes that the decision to include or exclude a student from state and district testing should be made by the Individual Educational Plan team based on guidelines such as: (1) the student's demonstrated cognitive ability prevents him/her from completing the required coursework and achieving state standards; (2) the student requires extensive direct instruction to accomplish the application of basic life skills and competencies; and (3) the student's inability to complete the required coursework is not due to excessive or extended absences or the result of social, cultural, or economic differences. Guidelines for determining appropriate accommodations include that such accommodations should facilitate an accurate demonstration of what the student knows and can do but should not provide the student with an unfair advantage or interfere with the validity of the test. Guidelines for accommodations in scheduling, setting, presentation, and responding are also offered.

POLICY PAPER



Accountability for Students with Disabilities in State and District Assessment Programs

MARCH 2000

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INTRODUCTION



This policy paper is written to outline considerations that school district personnel should address in determining the inclusion of students with disabilities in state and district testing and the use of alternate assessment for certain students with disabilities. In addition, this paper recommends guidelines for determining appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities who are included in state and district testing.

The general expectation of state and district assessment systems is that all students participate in assessment for accountability purposes. Students must be afforded the appropriate accommodations for assessment. Testing should result in an accurate reflection of the individual's educational achievement. However, a student's disability may be such that alternative assessment measures would be more meaningful and appropriate than participating, with accommodations, in assessments provided by the state or district. The decision to include or exclude a student with disabilities in state and district testing shall be made by the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) team based on the guidelines listed in this paper. This decision should be guided by past performance of the student, and whether the student is pursuing a course of study to obtain a standard high school diploma. Given these considerations, students who require a differentiated curriculum as outlined on the IEP may be excluded from participating in regularly scheduled state and district assessments. As required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997, students excluded from statewide testing must be provided an alternate assessment to reflect student achievement.

It is the intent of the Department to be accountable for all students and accurately report the progress of all students. The scores of students with disabilities on state assessments are included in statewide summary results. Scores of students with disabilities will be aggregated and disaggregated on statewide assessment reports. For the purposes of determining schools' performance grades, only the scores of students with disabilities identified as solely speech impaired or hospital/homebound will be included.

Using the criteria listed on the following pages, each school district is expected to establish specific policies for determining exclusion from state and district testing and procedures for subsequent use of alternate assessment procedures so that decisions made by IEP teams on individual students will be consistent across schools. To provide consistency across school districts in determining exclusion from general testing at the state and district levels, the following criteria have been established by the Department.

GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE STATE OR DISTRICT ASSESSMENT

Guidelines for Exclusion for Students with Disabilities

Exclusion may be permitted only when all of the following criteria are met:

- The student's demonstrated cognitive ability prevents the student from completing required coursework and achieving the Sunshine State Standards even with appropriate and allowable course accommodations.
- The student requires extensive direct instruction to accomplish the application and transfer of skills and competencies needed for domestic, community living, leisure, and vocational activities.
- The student's inability to complete the required coursework is not due to excessive or extended absences or the result of social, cultural, or economic differences.

For students of high school age an additional criterion must also be met:

- The student is unable to complete the regular diploma program even with allowable course accommodations and adaptations.

Guidelines for Determining Appropriate Accommodations

Determination of appropriate accommodations in assessment situations for students with disabilities shall be based on the individual needs of each student. Decisions on accommodations shall be made by the IEP team and recorded on the IEP. Students with disabilities should be oriented to any test situation through test-taking instruction designed to familiarize them with testing format and procedures. This orientation should take place near the time of testing. Guidelines recommended for making accommodation decisions include:

- Accommodations should facilitate an accurate demonstration of what the student knows or can do.
- Accommodations should not provide the student with an unfair advantage or interfere with the validity of a test; they must not change the underlying skills that are being measured by the test.
- Accommodations must be the same or nearly the same as adaptations used by the student in completing classroom instruction and assessment activities.
- Accommodations must be necessary for enabling the student to demonstrate knowledge, ability, skill, or mastery.

Note:

Students who are excluded from the state assessment program must be assessed with an alternate assessment procedure to be determined by the IEP team.

Test manuals generally provide a listing of allowable accommodations that can be used for all students, including students with disabilities.

Accommodations for students with disabilities currently allowable for statewide testing that could be provided for district testing, as well, include:

- **Scheduling —**
Students may be assessed in several brief sessions kept within the time period of the testing schedule. Extended time may be provided as appropriate for the particular test being administered.
- **Setting —**
Students may take tests in individual or small group settings with a test proctor present.
- **Presentation —**
Students may be presented with test materials using alternative formats including Braille, large print, or regular print enlarged through mechanical or electronic means. Other accommodations include the intervention of test administrators or

proctors for the purposes of understanding directions, prompts, and other test stimuli within the limits of test validity. Signed or oral presentation may be made of items and directions other than reading items. **Items which assess reading must be read by the student either visually or tactually.**

- **Responding —**
Students may use written, signed, or verbal methods of response. Written responses may include use of mechanical and electronic devices. Student responses may be transcribed to the answer sheet without any modification to the student's response.

School personnel must keep in mind the purpose for any testing situation and make sound decisions regarding the inclusion of and accommodations appropriate for students with disabilities. Decisions should be based on written district policy guidelines that mirror the suggestions in this policy paper, must be made by the IEP team, and must reflect the best interest of each individual student.



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